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The Mother of God in the Eastern Church Cult

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Abstract

Mother of God is an attribute of the Virgin Mary, expressing the teaching that she gave birth to Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. The Third Ecumenical Council (Ephesus, 431 A.D.) established the necessity to confess that the All-Pure Mother of the Lord be acclaimed as Ever-Virgin and truly the Theotokos, and recognized, consequently, her attribute of Mediator in prayer before God for us. Her quality of Mother of God (Gr. Μητηρ τοῦ Θεοῦ) or God-Bearer (Gr. Θεοτόκος) has been assimilated as well by the liturgical conscience of the Church, and all the hymns and prayers addressed to the Virgin Mary mention her with this attribute.

Keywords

cult, supraveneration, Virgin Mary, prayer, dogma

I. Introduction

The delicate work, full of grace, of so many pious Christians, along the centuries¹, paints today in the Orthodox Church hymnography a true icon of the history of salvation. For each celebration, the liturgical books intertwine David's divine psalms with the Christian melodist's poetry, the prophet's voice with the historical narrative in the Synaxarion, or the angelic song with the teaching of some Holy Father.

The place of honour held by the Mother of God in the Church cult life, but also in the personal life of every believer, is confirmed by the countless appellatives, invocations and prayers pervading the entire Orthodox hymnography. At the Annunciation, the creation-engendering *Fiat* of the Father receives as answer the *fiat* of All-Pure-Virgin Mary: "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." (Lk 1, 38). This *fiat* is the *sine-qua-non* human foundation of the Incarnation, the affirmative answer, the free *yes* of mankind uttered by the mouth of Mary². The Mother of the Lord is not an autonomous cult object, but the fundament of the correct faith. Her personality has been intensely discussed, especially during the first Christian centuries. The Orthodox patristic thinking and the Third Ecumenical Council approached and dismissed many heresies concerning the Most Holy Bearer of God.

The consent of the Virgin played a decisive role in the eternal plan of the embodiment of the Son of God. God had to convince Mary to assume the role. The agreement of the Virgin is the triumph of human liberty, the first free move of man towards regaining the lost Paradise.

¹ Usually, the specialists distinguish in the evolution of the Christian hymnographic literature three great periods. The first is the *period of the beginnings*, the timid beginnings of the Christian liturgical poetry, comprising the first four centuries, up to st. Gregory of Nazianzus, including; the second is the *period of the first bloom*, from the 5th to the 7th century, culminating with Roman the Melodist; the third begins with st. Andrew of Crete and goes up to the 11th and the 12th century, when *the decline of the hymnographic poetry* begins.

² Paul EVDOKIMOV, *The Sacrament of Love. The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, transl. by Anthony P. Gythiel and Victoria Steadman, with a foreword by Olivier Clément, st. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, 1995, pp. 37-38.

St Andrew of Crete highlights this liberty, describing the hesitation, pondering and decision of Mary to say *yes*. Mary had a justified doubt, which, according to St Andrew, was not the fruit of unfaithfulness, but of a mature faith. She knew the Scriptures and, especially, Isaiah's affirmation that *the virgin will conceive and will give birth to a son*. Humble and holy as she was, Mary did not hurry to identify herself with this virgin. Her consent was given after a long reflection, because, as St Andrew observes, "It was reasonable for her, as a well-born girl who was also a descendant of David, to have a share in the divine narratives in Scripture and to cast her mind at once to the fall of her ancestress, having remembered the slip [caused by] deceit and all the other sorts of things that have been recounted by the ancients"³.

Mary's free consent to the will of God is not highlighted in St Andrew's Canon. Although the poet attributes many names to her, he does not refer to Mary's age at the time of the Annunciation. He chooses to focus mainly on hymns and prayers to the Mother of the Lord, the Lady, the God-Bearer, oriented towards the liturgical character of his poem. He wants to glorify her and implore her in all the greatness and honour that she has been enjoying along the centuries and not to focus on her historical existence and her human moments. However, he does not try to change or minimize the historicity of her existence. On the contrary, he underlines her continual historical presence in the life of the believers, as Supporter and Helper in the historical events of every epoch and every *Urb* looking for its salvation. For this reason, St Andrew emphasizes especially the honour that God the Father gave to Mary, by deciding that His Only-Begotten Son be born from her womb, so that man may become a collaborator in the plan of his own salvation⁴.

Consequently, the contribution of the Mother of the Lord was not just the act of this consent, nor the birth and the education of Christ as man. In space and time, she is the mother of all the Christians. It is to her

³ ST. ANDREW OF CRETE, "Oration on the Annunciation of the Supremely Holy Lady, Our Theotokos", in: *Wider than Heaven. Eighth-Century Homilies on The Mother of God*, transl. and introd. by Mary B. Cunningham, st. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, 2008, p. 211.

⁴ Pr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului*, Omniscop, Craiova, ²1993, p. 165.

that the Christians run in their tribulations and temptations. Her power of meditation and salvation is underlined particularly in the Canon. The poet, as a model for every believer, runs to her with a cry of imploration and with spontaneity: “O Theotokos, the home and protection of those who sing thy praises, take from me the heavy yoke of sin and, pure Lady, accept me in repentance”⁵.

II. The Church teaching on the Mother of God or the God-Bearer

In the 5th century, taking attitude against the heresy of Nestorius, the Church details the teaching on the Mother of the Lord during the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431). The dogmatic definition of this Council together with the dogmatic definitions of the Fifth and Seventh Ecumenical Councils (553, Constantinople and 787, Nicaea) constitute, to this day, in the Orthodox Church, the foundation of the teaching about the Mother of the Lord and of the supra-veneration⁶ dedicated to her.

The heretic Nestorius⁷ (cca. 380-440), bishop of Constantinople, claimed that in Jesus Christ there are two persons (δύο πρόσωπα): the divine person of the Son of God, born from the Father before all ages, and the human or historical person, with which He was born from the Virgin Mary. Between the two persons he claimed there was only a moral relation consisting only of the harmonious collaboration between the two natures (ένωσις σχετική, συνάφεια). While this heresy led to the claim that God the Father had two sons, Nestorius was also claiming that the Virgin Mary did not give birth to the Son of God, and therefore she did not deserve the appellation of “God-Bearer” (Θεοτόκος). He insisted emphatically

⁵ “Theotokion”, Canticle one, Thursday in the First Week, Great Compline, the fourth section of the Great Canon of st. Andrew of Crete, in: *The Lenten Triodion*, transl. from the original Greek by Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, st. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, South Canaan, 2002, p. 256.

⁶ For an introduction to this issue, see: Lucian FARCAȘIU, “Supra-Veneration of Theotokos in the Liturgical Services of the Orthodox Church”, in: *Teologia*, 92 (2022), nr. 3, pp. 27-45.

⁷ Νίκος Α. ΜΑΤΣΟΥΚΑΣ, *Όρθοδοξία και αίρεση*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1992, p. 285 sqq.

that, as she had given birth to the man-Christ, she had to be called man-Bearer (ανθρωποτόκος) or, at the most, Christ-Bearer (Χριστοτόκος). As strange as it may seem, Nestorius was aligning himself in this attempt to the philosophical views of the Antiochian School, which professed through some of its representatives that neither the body of Christ deserved veneration nor the expressions “God was born, God suffered” were adequate.

“God-Bearer” (Gr. Θεοτόκος) is an attribute addressed to the Mother of the Lord expressing the faith that the Holy Virgin Mary gave birth to the Son of God⁸. This teaching is expressed in all the prayers and hymns addressed to the Mother of the Lord. Namely, in the liturgical books we have Theotokia (Θεοτόκιον) and Bogorodicina. Teotokia is a hymn in which the Mother of the Lord is supra-venerated as God-Bearer. Similarly, Bogorodicina is a stichera or a troparion dedicated to the Mother of God, coming from the Slavonic Bogorodița, namely God-Bearer. We have such hymns, during the Vespers and the Matins, and in the canons of the feasts and of the normal days in the Octoechos, Mineion, Triodion and Penticostarion. The Saturday evening vespers, for any tone, all contain these Bogorodicina after the stichera following the Psalms 140/141 (“Lord, I cry out to You”) and 141/142 (“I cry out to the Lord with my voice”). At the same time, the Bogorodicina can represent the collection of troparia and canons honoring the Mother of the Lord, read only in monasteries, every day of the week, during the Compline, after the *Credo*.

In the texts of the liturgical books we meet a lot of references denying this heresy and showing that Jesus Christ is not separated in two persons:

“Through the divine Spirit, by the will of the Father, without seed thou didst conceive the Son of God Who hath existed without mother from before the ages, and for our sake thou gavest birth in the flesh unto Him Who came forth thee without father; and thou didst nurture Him on milk as a babe. Wherefore, cease not to pray that our souls be delivered from tribulations”⁹.

⁸ Pr. Nicolae D. NECULA, “Adormirea Maicii Domnului în cultul Bisericii Ortodoxe”, in: *Glasul Bisericii*, LIII (1997), nr. 5-8, pp. 27-35.

⁹ “Theotokion”, Apostikha, Saturday Evening, Great Vespers, tone III, in: *The Octoechos: The Hymns of the Cycle of the Eight Tones for Sundays and Weekdays*

The crucifixion of the “Lord of glory” (1 Cor 2, 8) is a biblical leitmotif in the Christian hymnography, highlighting the impenetrable mystery and immeasurable effectiveness of this salvific act, or as a modern theologian has expressed it: “It is also the Word who died on the cross. For this reason, the death of the Word was really redemptive, since the death of a man, even the most righteous of all, would have remained merely the death of a human individual”¹⁰.

Nestorius was unable to understand how can exist a nature which does not have its own hypostasis¹¹. In his correspondence with St Cyril, Nestorius had refused to admit that, as God, the Logos could have been “born” from the Virgin and could have died on the cross. He was nevertheless willing to agree that Christ – the incarnate God – was born and suffered in the flesh¹². Nestorianism was in essence ambiguous, because it implicitly admitted a duality of subjects between the Logos and Christ. According to Nestorius, it was obvious that all that could be said about the Logos, incarnate or not, necessarily had to be attributed to the divine *nature* itself. Expressions such as “The Logos died on the cross” or “The Logos was born from Mary” were, in his eyes, detrimental to the attributes of the divine nature, which had remained unchanged even after the enfleshment of God. “By the contact of the temple in which it dwelt (τῇ τοῦ ναοῦ συναφείᾳ¹³) the Word’s divine nature became itself subject to corruption”¹⁴, Nestorius claimed.

The Birth of the Savior, which was realized without pleasure and without pain, represents a radical renewal of the laws to which sin submitted human nature, in other words, just as the Church hymns say,

(Including the Eleven Resurrection Gospels and Their Stichera and Exapostilaria and the Daily Expostilaria), vol. II: *Tones III & IV*, transl. from the Church Slavonic by the Reader Isaac E. Lambertsen, The st. John of Kronstadt Press, 1999, p. 5.

¹⁰ John MEYENDORFF, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, Corpus Books, Washington, 1969, p. 8.

¹¹ E. AMANN, “Nestorius”, in: *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, t. VI, 155.

¹² *A doua Scrisoare către Chiril*, PG 77, 52b.

¹³ *A doua Scrisoare către Chiril*, PG 77, 53a.

¹⁴ J. MEYENDORFF, *Christ in Eastern...*, p. 11.-

a “seedless” conception and a birth “without corruption” took place¹⁵, without destroying the virginity of the Mother of the Lord¹⁶. To express this truth, again the Byzantine hymnography is the best testimony for us:

“Once the image of the Bride who knoweth not wedlock was inscribed in the Red Sea. There Moses was the parter of the waters; and here Gabriel is the minister of a miracle. There Israel traversed the deep dryshod; and now the Virgin giveth birth unto Christ without seed. The sea remained impassible after Israel had crossed; and the immaculate one remaineth incorrupt after the birth of Emmanuel. O God Who hast appeared as a man, Who existest and hast existed from the beginning: Have mercy upon us!”¹⁷

Another prerogative of our Savior Jesus Christ, the God-Man, and which emphasizes the hypostatic union of the two natures in Jesus Christ is closely related to the supranatural birth.

It is about the impeccability or sinlessness of Christ. This means his total freedom from sin, both from the original sin and from any personal

¹⁵ ST. MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Ambigua*, PG 91, 1341c-1349a; Ambiguum 42 (Maxime de Chrysopolis, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers. The Ambigua*, transl. by Nicholas Constatas, Harvard University Press, 2014, pp. 173-187); See also SF. MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua. Tâlcuiri ale unor locuri cu adânci înțelesuri din Sfinții Dionisie Areopagitul și Grigorie Teologul*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 80, transl. by Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1983, pp. 269-297).

¹⁶ ST. MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Ambigua*, PG 91, 1276a: “For this was a conception pure of any seed, and a birth completely untouched by corruption, which is why the mother of the one born remained a virgin even after giving birth, and indeed suffered no pain while giving birth – which is a paradox that goes far beyond every law and principle of nature – and God deemed it worthy to be born from her in the flesh, and through His birth bound the bonds of His mother’s virginity more tightly.” (Ambiguum 31, p. 41; D. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Ambigua...*, p. 239).

¹⁷ “The dogmatik theotokion”, Saturday Evening, Great Vespers, tone V, in: *The Octoechos: The Hymns of the Cycle of the Eight Tones for Sundays and Weekdays (Including the Eleven Resurrection Gospels and Their Stichera and Exapostilaria and the Daily Expostilaria)*, vol. III: *Tones V & VI*, transl. from the Church Slavonic by the Reader Isaac E. Lambertsen, The st. John of Kronstadt Press, 1999, p. 5.

sin. The Holy Fathers unanimously teach that Jesus Christ was born without the ancestral sin due to His supranatural embodiment and birth, namely from the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary being herself cleansed from the ancestral sin the moment when the Son of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is embodied.

St John of Damascus, having a profound knowledge of the teaching of faith, subtly catches in his hymns also the fact that in Jesus Christ are excluded both the internal fight and the fight with sinful passions, as He does not partake of sin at all.

The Mother of God has been so honored in our liturgical hymns, that the stichera praising her decorate each page of the ritual books.

“A virgin who no nuptials knew thou didst bring forth, and thou, unwedded mother, virgin didst remain, God-bearing Mary: O pray Christ our God that we be sav’d”¹⁸.

The Mother of the Lord is presented as undeniable God-Bearer. The fact that she miraculously gave birth to the Son of God is reminded to the believers many times in the hymns. She is called *God-Bearer*, *Mother of God*, *Mother of our God*, *Mother of God the Logos*. Entire complex sentences are also used, characterizing her Son, either calling Him *God* and *Son of God*, or attributing to Him names and expressions indicating the divine attributes.

Also, we find many hymns where she is called: “crop which yielded the divine wheat”, “gate of the light of life”, “the beginning of Christ’s wonders”, “the unburnable burning bush”, “table carrying the bread of life”, “palace and chair of the King”, “flight of steps to heaven on which God descended to us”¹⁹ etc.

¹⁸ 3rd troparion from *The Troparia*, tone VI, “The Order of the Lesser Sanctification of Water”, *Book of Needs of the Holy Orthodox Church: With an Appendix Containing Offices for the Laying on of Hands*, transl. by G.V. Shann, London, 1894, p. 230.

¹⁹ Beside the hymns of the main cult books (Octoechos, Triodion, Penticostarion and Mineion), in: honour of the Mother of God were written three *Akathists*, two *Parakleses* and the *Funeral of the Mother of the Lord*, composed by Manuel of Corinth (beginning of the 16th century), where we find the appellatives enumerated above.

Consequently, we can justly supravenerate her, saying to her:

*“Every tongue doth glorify thee, O pure and all-hymned Theotokos, who art the glory and boast of our race and the guide of the lost.”*²⁰

The supranatural birth was called for by the role of Saviour of the Word, who needed to have a sinless human nature, as He was to recreate man and the cosmos. But, this was not attainable except by avoiding the normal manner of birth of men, so as not to draw upon the bearer the ancestral sin:

*“Thou givest birth and art a virgin, and in both thou remainest by nature inviolate. He who is born makes new the laws of nature (ο τεχθείς καινίζει νόμους φύσεως), and thy womb brings forth without travail. When God so wills, the natural order is overcome; for He does whatever He wishes.”*²¹

Everywhere is highlighted the ever-virginity of the Mother of the Lord. She is called: *the immaculate Lady, the unblemished Virgin, the pure Lady, the Virgin nurturing with milk* etc. The poet emphasizes that the Mother of the Lord remained a Virgin both in the conception of the Son of God and after His birth, being in full agreement with the Orthodox teaching.

But, we need to take note, it is precisely for this reason that the Church praises the Mother-Virgin, uttering together with the highest-ranking Angel:

“Hail, for thou bringest opposites to harmony:

²⁰ *Now & ever...*, Ode VII, tone VII, Monday Night Compline (Canon of Supplication to the All-Holy Theotokos) in *The Octoechos: The Hymns of the Cycle of the Eight Tones for Sundays and Weekdays (Including the Eleven Resurrection Gospels and Their Stichera and Exapostilaria and the Daily Expostalaria)*, vol. IV: *Tones VII & VIII*, transl. from the Church Slavonic by the Reader Isaac E. Lambertsen, The st. John of Kronstadt Press, 1999, p. 31.

²¹ “Theotokion”, Canticle four, Thursday of the Great Canon of st. Andrew of Crete, in: *The Lenten Triodion...*, p. 394.

Hail, for thou hast joined in one childbirth and virginity.”²²

Therefore, because she is not just a virgin, innocent, without blemish, holy, but because she also conceives, becomes a Mother, is a God-Bearer, because she is a “virgin nurturing with milk a baby.” And when the Church depicts in icon the Mother of God with the Baby in her arms, she is also marked with three stars, on her forehead and on her shoulders, reinforcing once more the faith in her threefold virginity: before, during and after the birth²³.

An important teaching is that by the Virgin Mary are corrected the human sinful deeds that occurred at the beginning of the creation, the Virgin Mary being the New Eve.

St Cyril of Jerusalem (cca. 318-386) making this comparison between Eve and Mary says: “Through Eve, yet a virgin, came death; there was need that through a virgin, or rather from a virgin, that life should appear; that as the serpent deceived the one, so Gabriel should bring the good news to the other.”²⁴, while St Gregory of Nyssa describes even more expressively the theme Eve-Mary when he says: “The woman has made a defense in behalf of the woman. The earlier gave the entrance for sin, but the latter ministered to the entrance of righteousness. The former obtained the counsel of the serpent; the latter introduced the slayer of the serpent. The former introduced sin through the tree [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil]; the latter, instead, brings in good through the tree [The Cross]”²⁵.

²² *The Akathistos Hymn to the Most Holy Theotokos*, Ikos Eight, Saturday in the Fifth Week, in: *The Lenten Triodion...*, p. 429.

²³ Pr. Constantin GALERIU, “Maica Domnului «Povățuitoarea»”, in: *Ortodoxia*, XXXII (1980), nr. 3, p. 462.

²⁴ ST. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, “Catechetical Lecture 12. On the words Incarnate, and Made Man”, 15, in: *The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem: Volume 1*, transl. by Leo P. McCauley and Anthony A. Stephenson, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, 1969, p. 235.

²⁵ ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA, “On the Nativity of the Savior”, in: Beth Elise DUNLOP, *Earliest Greek Patristic Orations on the Nativity: A Study including translations*, PhD dissertation, Boston College, May, 2004, p. 176.

The first prophecy of the Old Testament is the Protoevangel, called this way because it was the first good news that God gave to the human nation concerning the salvation. Its content is as follows: “And I will put enmity/ Between you and the woman,/ And between your seed and her Seed;/ He shall bruise your head,/ And you shall bruise His heel.” (Gen 3, 15) This refers to the cursing of the serpent by God, after it tempted the first people. The meaning of the prophecy is as follows: the snake is the devil, and his seed are all those like him. The woman whose seed shall crush the head of the snake, according to most of the Holy Fathers, is the Virgin Mary. During the celebration of the Annunciation, the Church supraglorifies this victory because, metaphorically, the victory over the devil means the defeat of the author of evil:

“Today all creation rejoiceth as the archangel saith to thee “Rejoice!”, O blessed, honored and all-pure Mother of Christ God. *Today the arrogance of the serpent is cast into darkness, for the bond of our forefather’s curse is annulled.* Wherefore, we cry out to thee unceasingly: Rejoice, O joyous one!”²⁶

The Archangel Gabriel seeing “the spiritual infancy” of the young Mary clarifies things for her and calms her down: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.” (Lk 1, 35) St Ambrose synthesizes this truth in a short sentence: “The fruit of the womb is the work of the Spirit”²⁷.

Consequently, the Virgin Mary made herself for us God-Bearing heaven, as it is in her that divinity came down and settled. For us, she

²⁶ 2nd sessional hymn, in: tone III, at Matins, March 25th: “Feast of the Annunciation of Our All-holy Mistress, the Theotokos & Ever-virgin Mary”, in: *Menaion, March*, tr. by Isaac Lambertsen, 2000, <https://www.ponomar.net/maktabah/MenaionLambertsenMarch2000/0325442.html>.

²⁷ ST. AMBROSE OF MILAN, *On the Holy Spirit*, II, 5, 38, transl. by H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin and H.T.F. Duckworth., coll. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, vol. 10, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), Christian Literature Publishing Co., Buffalo, 1896, p. 119.

humbled herself, to lift us up, but His nature was not a bit modified by this. In her, He weaved the garment of our salvation. We learn and feel as Orthodox believers that without the Holy Communion we cannot have true life; however, the Holy Communion would not be possible without the Mother of God, because if Christ had not had where to take His body from, He would not have been able to give it to us. We cannot partake of the divinity directly, without the bodily (physical) mediation of Christ. This is why the Holy Apostle Peter is calling us to become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pt 1, 4) because the Mother of God gave, as a gift, human body to Christ. In Christ, His human nature coexists united unmixed to His divine nature, the two natures becoming through His Hypostasis one, so that when Christ gives Himself to us for us to partake of Him, He gives Himself to us with according to both the natures.

III. Jesus Christ – the New Adam and Virgin Mary – the New Eve

In our pious understanding, Jesus Christ forms together His Mother a unitary image, such as that in the icons. One cannot think of the God-Bearer without her divine Son, nor can one think of the God-Man Jesus Christ without His Mother, the God-Bearer. The Virgin Mary shared humanity to the Son of God and, in His turn, He exalted her above all human and angelic beings. The New Adam and the New Eve fulfill the divine plan regarding humanity, linking the earth to heaven and the divine nature to the human one.

At the Creation, God made the man and woman one, and called them equally “Adam”²⁸, i.e. Mankind. He used no other name to identify the woman than “Adam’s”, an identity revealing her origin and unity with the man (out of Adam’s rib). At the enfleshment of the Son of God, the Virgin Mary, too, becomes “Christ’s”. She, too, through the conception in her blessed womb of the divine Son, became the God-Bearer, the Mother

²⁸ “This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in: the likeness of God made he him; Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name *Adam*, in the day when they were created.” (Gen 5, 1-2).

of the God-Man, and the mother of all mankind who follow Him. As the New Eve, overshadowed by the power of the Most High, she received and fulfilled the gift to conceive from the Holy Spirit the “fruit” of Life which was going to be hanged on the tree/Cross for the redemption of the human race (Lk 1, 42; Acts 5, 30; Matt 1, 21). She gave Him a victorious human nature, cleansed from the ancestral sin, becoming herself, through obedience and faith, an image of Christ’s Body, the Church, whose head is Christ. Our Lord settled Himself in her as an anticipation of His presence in the whole Church and as He promised to dwell, by His divine mercy, in every believer and follower of Him. This is why we honour the Mother of God calling her “the most holy chariot of He who is on the Cherubim” and “the most holy shelter of He who is on the Seraphim”. She is the woman announced in Paradise (Gen 3, 15), she is the New Eve, the Mother of Life, the Mother of the new mankind.

The presence of the teaching on the Savior Christ as The New Adam in the works of the hymnographers needs no more arguments, in our opinion. It is inspired directly from Paul’s doctrine concerning this problem (1 Cor 15, 45-47; Rom 5, 12-19) which proves that here we are not dealing just with a pious poetic invention²⁹.

The hymnographers often appeal to parallelism. The typology used in the hymns hammer the value of the first Adam as a prophetic image pointing to Jesus Christ. There are many examples of type-archetype parallels, such as the one in the Holy Friday Lamentations (Τα Εγκώμια): “By Thy death, O Saviour, Thou hast led back to life Adam who of old, by malice was made to die; Thou wast seen as *the new Adam* in the flesh”³⁰. Some of them underline not only the typological significance, but also the distance in quality and good between the two realities: the old Adam – the New Adam, the first Eve – the New Eve/the Holy Virgin (“Through thee, O Virgin, hath the restoration of Eve truly been made manifest...”³¹), or

²⁹ Arhim. Benedict GHIUȘ, *Taina răscumpărării în imnografia ortodoxă*, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1998, p. 37.

³⁰ *Triodion, The Lamentations of Holy Saturday*, 33rd troparion, p. 5, available at: <https://www.orthodox.net/services/lamentations-of-holy-saturday.pdf> (accessed: 07.09.2024).

³¹ “Theotokion”, Ode III *Canon of the Cross*, Friday Matins, tone IV, in: *The Octoechos: The Hymns of the Cycle of the Eight Tones for Sundays and Weekdays (Including*

the mystery of the divine economy concerning salvation: the the wood/tree through which the serpent (the devil)'s counsel made Adam mortal and the the wood of the Cross which brought to men salvation and life ("In Eden the tree brought corruption upon the first of our race, but the tree of the Cross blossomed forth life at the place of the skull"³²) etc.

We cannot help reminding, in this study, of two hymnographic creations, so well known in the Orthodox poetry, and in which one can find all the attributes of the Mother of the Lord. They are the *Akathist of the Mother of the Lord* or the *Akathist of the Annunciation*, read during the Matins of Saturday (actually in the Friday evening service) during the 5th week of the Lent. During this divine service, the *Akathist of the Mother of the Lord* is read in 4 parts, with a repetition of the first kontakion "Τη Υπερμάχῳ Στρατηγῷ (Defender Lady...)". The origin of this celebration of the *Akathist* is due to the liberation of the city of Constantinople from under the siege of the Persians, in the year 626, and then of the Saracens and the Agarenes, who sieged Constantinople. With the help of the Mother of the Lord, acquired by vigils, ceaseless prayers and processions with the holy icons, especially with the wonder-working icon of the Mother of God, they made of the City of Constantinople an undefeatable one. On this occasion, Sergius the Patriarch seems to have composed the Kontakion: "Τη Υπερμάχῳ Στρατηγῷ".

The *Akathist of the Annunciation* is a true poetical and musical work of art, in iambic verses³³. Its content deals with the dogma of the Incarnation³⁴. Its composition is attributed to either the Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople († 638), or his deacon George of Pisidia, or Roman

the Eleven Resurrection Gospels and Their Stichera and Exapostilaria and the Daily Exopostilaria), vol. II: *Tones III & IV...*, p. 134.

³² 2nd troparion from the 3rd sessional hymns of the Cross, tone VI, Wednesday Matins, tone IV, in: *The Octoechos: The Hymns of the Cycle of the Eight Tones for Sundays and Weekdays (Including the Eleven Resurrection Gospels and Their Stichera and Exapostilaria and the Daily Exopostilaria)*, vol. III: *Tones V & VI...*, p. 120.

³³ Prof. Teodor TARNAVSCI, "Caracterul poetic al serviciului divin ortodox", in: *Candela*, XXIV (1905), nr. 8, p. 450.

³⁴ Pr. Petre VINTILESCU, *Despre poezia imnografică din cărțile de ritual și cântarea bisericească*, Pace, București, 1937, p. 89.

the Melodist³⁵ (between 536-556) and it was completed by Andrew of Crete³⁶.

The last of them, in *The Canon* which bears his name, praises the ever-virginity of the Mother of the Lord and manage to shake up the believer's being, calling everyone to stand in respect and veneration in front of such a mystery. As in any liturgical text with saving purpose and content, in the *Canon* is highlighted also the essential role of the Mother of the Lord in God's plan of salvation, in the Divine Oikonomia. It is highlighted that by the Mother of the Lord is accomplished the promise made by God to our forefathers, because she received the grace to give birth to God the Word. This mystery is the key by which the Divine Oikonomia opens the door leading mankind to its salvation: "thou hast opened the heavenly places to us on earth"³⁷.

IV. Conclusions

To conclude, the paramount role of the Mother of the Lord does not end with the birth of her divine Son, nor with her Dormition. The divine maternity draws consequences on the woman who yielded from her body a body for God, who remains alive after her death and who at her Dormition has not left us. She is the most powerful prayer-utterer and mediator, our guarantor in front of her Son, the proof of the power of her mediation being shown even since the marriage from Cana of Galilee (John 2, 1-11).

³⁵ Constantin Litzeica considers Roman the Melodist "the most genial Byzantine poet" (*Poezia religioasă bizantină*, București, 1889, p. 11), and the great Byzantinist Karl Krumbacher called him "Pindar der rhythmischen Poesie" [Pindar of rhythmic poetry"] (*Studien zu Romanos*, München, 1898, p. 84).

³⁶ Πλάτωνος Κ. ΣΤΑΜΑΤΑΚΗ, *Εκκλησιαστική ή Βυζαντινή Υμνογραφία και αναλυτική ερμηνεία του Ακαθίστου Ύμνου*, Ἀθῆναι, 1940, 198 p.; V. McNABB O.P., *The Akathistos Hymn*, Blackfriars Publications, Oxford, 1947; Carlo DEL GRANDE, *L'Inno Acatisto in onore della Madre di Dio*, Fussi, Firenze, 1948, 115 pp.

³⁷ "Theotokion", Canticle seven, Thursday in the First Week, Great Compline, the fourth section of the Great Canon of st. Andrew of Crete, in: *The Lenten Triodion...*, p. 263.

The Mother of God has been so honoured in our liturgical hymns that the stichera praising her adorn each page of the ritual books.

They give us the most complete idea on the place that the most Holy God-Bearer holds in the divine oikonomia and of the praise we ought to offer her is her quality of Mother of God (Gr. Μήτηρ τοῦ Θεοῦ) or God-Bearer (Gr. Θεοτόκος), confessed by the Holy Scripture, defined as dogma by the Church during the Ecumenical Councils and versified in the hymns dedicated to her.